



April 30, 2021

Edward Stollof
Manager, Project Planning Branch
Planning and Sustainability Division
District Department of Transportation
VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear Mr. Stollof:

I write on behalf of the Cleveland Park Citizens Association, a non-profit membership organization of Cleveland Park residents, founded in 1911, to provide our comments on the District Department of Transportation Connecticut Avenue NW Reversible Lane Safety and Operations Study.

CPCA considers this study of great importance for the community and has engaged directly with DDOT to better understand the issues raised and analysis conducted to date, in addition to hosting and supporting community events with DDOT regarding it. We appreciate the efforts DDOT has made to inform affected communities such as ours and hear the questions and concerns of residents.

It is clear that changes are needed to improve traffic safety, shift towards sustainable transport, and help our local business strips thrive. In brief, CPCA endorses identifying and pursuing an approach that will best promote these critical goals, recognizing that no option can be perfect and that changing the design of Connecticut Avenue is only one of a range of actions needed. We look forward to continuing to work with DDOT to ensure the study results best address these critical goals.

Our comments reflect the views expressed by our members and identify issues we believe need further consideration based upon the information available to us to date.

A. Options B vs. C and removal of reversible lanes

DDOT has indicated that it is now, essentially, assessing the relative merits of Options B and C as against “no change,” and deciding whether to select one of these two proposed approaches for further refinement and potential implementation.

Accordingly, we note the results of a survey we conducted this past month of CPCA members. A majority of responding members supported Option C. In addition, responding members strongly supported traffic safety as a current concern and priority to address. A majority also identified the well-being of our neighborhood commercial strip as a priority and looked to redesign as a means to help make the area more pedestrian friendly and viable commercially.

Consistent with these member views, a principle CPCA concern is to address traffic speed and safety, for pedestrians and all those sharing the roads including on bikes and in motor vehicles. This concern extends beyond Connecticut Avenue to adjoining neighborhood streets and alternate commuter routes supporting and running through our neighborhood.

Given the safety data DDOT has presented, CPCA supports not reinstating reversible lanes. In addition, we endorse incorporation of robust traffic calming measures, including enforced speed limits and such other controls as may be appropriate along Connecticut Avenue, within bordering neighborhoods, and along other corridors through them.

B. Issues needing further analysis

We understand that DDOT has conducted substantial research to arrive at its current, two preferred alternatives, taking into account public questions and concerns. We also understand that DDOT has not identified any other options that would have a more favorable overall effect on the underlying goals of safety, sustainability, and neighborhood well-being. However, substantive questions continue to be raised that DDOT has apparently not yet fully investigated. We identify below issues that warrant further analysis by DDOT, recognizing that additional issues will need to be considered as the study proceeds.

1. Loading & unloading and traffic diversion onto neighborhood streets.

DDOT has presented projections that the level of traffic diversion would be essentially the same under Options B and C, and would largely be to other corridors outside the bordering neighborhoods. DDOT has stated that diversion would be minimal to neighborhoods along Connecticut Avenue and to alternate routes supporting and through these neighborhoods such as Reno Road/34th Street and Wisconsin Avenue. We understand from DDOT staff that these studies take into account projected growth along the corridor and along other commuter routes. However, DDOT has not assessed how to address loading and unloading demands on Connecticut Avenue or the diversionary implications of double parking that may arise from such demand.

Double parking already occurs and can be anticipated to continue particularly within commercial strips such as Cleveland Park's where off-avenue commercial loading and unloading options are limited. DDOT staff have acknowledged that: (i) these challenges would be exacerbated with no parking at any time on one side of the Avenue, (ii) such double-parking would create significant back-ups if it were to occur, particularly if the number of traffic lanes in each direction is reduced to two, and (iii) this could significantly affect traffic volume and safety within adjoining neighborhoods and along alternate neighborhood routes such as Reno Road/34 Street. We note as well that portions of this corridor, including the commercial strip in Cleveland Park, have been identified as areas for further development, both commercial and residential, in proposed amendments to the DC Comprehensive Plan that are currently under review by the DC Council.

We urge DDOT to analyze the means to enhance capacity to support loading and unloading off Connecticut Avenue, enforcement tools to control loading and unloading on the Avenue to prevent diversion, and traffic calming measures to manage sufficiently the effects of any diversion that may still occur, and to publish the results to inform further public input.

2. The merits of including parking outside the commercial corridors.

We note feedback from DDOT officials that parking reduces traffic speed and may, thereby, significantly reduce accident rates, when parking near corners is eliminated. This information has not been shared at public sessions on the study to date to our knowledge, where an apparently less precise statement that reducing parking can improve safety has been presented. However, CPCA sought clarification and received this more nuanced explanation.

While parking may not be compatible on blocks where turning lanes will be included, we understand from DDOT that such parking can otherwise be combined with bike lanes throughout the corridor by adjusting the width of the bike lanes and buffers for them and, therefore, can be considered under Option C as well as under Option B.

Accordingly, we urge DDOT to analyze this concept further (which may also help support patronage of businesses in commercial strips along the corridor, see below), and publish its views to enable further public input.

3. Economic effects on commercial strips.

Businesses within the Cleveland Park Connecticut Avenue commercial strip have stated that parking is important to their viability. Other sources have noted studies indicating that addition of bike lanes can be good for local business. DDOT has shared some study information with CPCA indicating that the effects of bike lanes can vary with the specifics of a location, with neutral or positive effects being more common than negative ones.

DDOT is continuing to review such studies. It has not yet done any analysis of the effects of bike lanes in the specific circumstances found along the Connecticut Avenue corridor, such as: the mix of business types (e.g., restaurants, groceries, and other service providers); volume of parking still available when bike lanes are added, and mix of individuals using the bike lanes (e.g., whether they typically are commuting through or from the neighborhood at issue).

We urge DDOT to analyze and publish the results of its study of the potential effects of bike lanes for businesses within the Cleveland Park strip and other commercial strips along the corridor. We also call on DDOT to identify and present measures to ensure that whatever option is selected will have a positive, or at least neutral, effect on the well-being of these businesses.

4. Bike lanes and bus stops

We appreciate the assurances DDOT has offered regarding how bus movement and passenger entry and exit will be managed both to maximize efficiency of bus movement along the corridor and to ensure safety, including if bike lanes are added to the Avenue. We note the importance of these issues to promoting use of sustainable transport and to the well-being of those who depend on public buses for their daily commutes and day-to-day activities. We urge DDOT to analyze these issues thoroughly and to support whatever proposals it makes in this regard with published results of this analysis.

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Thank you for your considerations of our views, and again, for your engagement on this highly consequential topic. We appreciate DDOT's engagement to date and look forward to continuing to work with the study team on this effort.

Sincerely,



John Barlow Weiner
President